

Message Text

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LIMDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT VIENTIANE 5090 ACTION SECSTATE DTD 02 AUG

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 5090

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OREP (MANSFIELD, MIKE), LA

SUBJ: CODEL MANSFIELD

REF: STATE 182835

1. WHILE WE RECOGNIZE LONG-STANDING FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN SENATOR MANSFIELD AND PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA, WE MUST RECOMMEND STRONGLY AGAINST ANY VISIT BY THE SENATOR AT THIS TIME FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS:

A. SOUVANNA'S POWER IS VASTLY DIMINISHED AND HE IS NO LONGER CALLING THE SHOTS. ANY DISCUSSIONS MANSFIELD MIGHT HAVE WITH HIM WOULD INEVITABLY HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT CURRENT PROBLEMS CREATED BY PGNU FOR THIS MISSION; ON THESE PROBLEMS SOUVANNA HAS USUALLY TAKEN CORRECT POSITIONS, BUT HIS ORDERS ARE NOT IMPLEMENTED. TO REMIND HIM OF THIS FACT
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WOULD ONLY CAUSE HIM EMBARRASSMENT.

B. TO BE USEFUL, VISIT SHOULD ALSO INCLUDE MEETING WITH RANKING LAO PATRIOTIC FRONT (LPF) OFFICIAL, ACTING FONMIN PHOUNE SIPASEUTH. IN VIEW OF SENATOR MANSFIELD'S STATURE, HOWEVER, LPF LEADERS COULD MISINTERPRET VISIT AS INDICATION THAT USG HAD DECIDED TO FORGIVE AND FORGET THE HARASSMENTS OF THE LAST THREE MONTHS, AND PERHAPS EVEN THAT WE WERE PREPARED TO RESUME AID.

C. WHILE SOUVANNA HIMSELF MIGHT NOT RAISE QUESTION, ANY OTHER LAO WHO HAD A CRACK AT THE SENATOR WOULD BE APT TO RAISE QUESTIONS OF FUTURE AID AND PERHAPS OF AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE STONE'S NON-ARRIVAL -- ISSUES WHICH DEPARTMENT EVIDENTLY DOES NOT WANT SURFACED AT THIS TIME.

D. WHILE SENATOR MANSFIELD PRESUMABLY WOULD NOT BE OVERLY INTERESTED IN PRESS COVERAGE, IT NOW SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT ANY AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS WOULD BE ADMITTED TO LAOS TO COVER HIS VISIT, GIVEN REFUSAL OF VISAS EARLIER THIS WEEK TO GRAQ OF AP AND ANDELMAN OF NY TIMES AND LIKELIHOOD THAT FURTHER REFUSALS ARE IN STORE. FOR SENATOR MANSFIELD TO COME WHEN U.S. CORRESPONDENTS ARE BEING DENIED ADMISSION SEEMS TO US INCONSISTENT AND BASICALLY WRONG.

E. SOUVANNA DEPARTED VIENTIANE FOR LUANG PRABANG JULY 31 APPARENTLY WITHOUT SPECIFYING ANY DATE OF RETURN; WE HAVE HEARD THAT HE INTENDS TO SPEND AS LONG AS TWO WEEKS THERE, ALTHOUGH WE SUPPOSE THAT HE MIGHT RETURN SPECIALLY TO VIENTIANE IN ORDER TO RECEIVE SENATOR MANSFIELD. EVEN FLIGHT INTO VIENTIANE PRESENTS SUFFICIENT RISK (SEE BELOW), AND WE CANNOT IN GOOD CONSCIENCE RECOMMEND THAT THE SENATOR ATTEMPT TO TRAVEL TO LUANG PRABANG IN RAINY SEASON AND CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE EVEN IF HE WERE TO BE FURNISHED APPROPRIATE SMALLER AIRCRAFT BY US MILITARY IN THAILAND.

2. FOREGOING REPRESENT ARGUMENTS AGAINST VISIT BY SENATOR MANSFIELD. ONLY ARGUMENT IN FAVOR THAT WE CAN PERCEIVE, AND WE THINK IT A MARGINAL ONE, IS THAT SOUVANNA MIGHT DERIVE SOME ENCOURAGEMENT AND BOOST IN MORALE FROM SEEING THE SENATOR. HOWEVER, SOUVANNA IS SCHEDULED TO DEPART LAOS FOR FRANCE APPROXIMATELY TWO WEEKS LATER (AUGUST 29), AND IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT HIS POLITICAL IMPORTANCE

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WILL DECLINE EVEN MORE THE MINUTE HE LEAVES THE COUNTRY.

3. THE CRUX OF THE MATTER IS THAT THE LAO LEADERSHIP, PARTICULARLY LPF, WOULD RECEIVE FOR THE FIRST TIME AN AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENT OF THE VIEW OF CONGRESS ON INDOCHINA. THE VALUE OF THE VISIT THEN FINALLY COMES DOWN TO WHAT THE SENATOR WOULD SAY. IF HE TOOK AN UNEQUIVOCAL POSITION WITH REGARD TO AID (WHICH IS THE KEY ISSUE), IT

WOULD TEAR AWAY ALL AMBIGUITY ON FUTURE U.S. INTENTIONS AND, IN OUR JUDGMENT, ELIMINATE ALL CHANCES OF COMPROMISED SOLUTIONS OVER OUR IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS AND PROBABLY INCREASE PRESSURES ON MISSION. IF ON OTHER HAND SENATOR TOOK SYMPATHETIC ATTITUDE AND DANGLED POSSIBILITIES OF FUTURE AID, IT WOULD CONFIRM LPF'S SELF-ASSURANCE THAT THEY HAVE FOLLOWED CORRECT LINE AND THAT US WOULD GIVE REGARDLESS OF THE INDIGNITIES HEAPED UPON IT. IT SEEMS TO US THAT THIS IS A NO-WIN CASE. THE SENATOR'S VISIT CAN ONLY CONFUSE SITUATION AND OUR RELATIONS; IT CANNOT ALTER BASIC FACT THAT, FOR THE PRESENT, US IS NOT PREPARED TO CONSIDER FUTURE AID.

4. WATTAY AIRPORT CAN ACCOMMODATE A VC-135. HOWEVER, UNRELIABILITY OF NAVAIDS NECESSITATES RESTRICTION TO VFR OPERATIONS ONLY. BASIC AIRPORT SPECIFICATIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS: FIELD ELEVATION 559 FEET MSL; RWY 13/31, 9,800 FEET X 140 FEET WITH SWL 88/TDT 800 WEIGHT-BEARING CAPACITY.

5. REGARDING ENTRY, WE BELIEVE WE COULD OBTAIN DIPLOMATIC CLEARANCE FOR AIRCRAFT, ASSURANCE THAT DISSIDENT RAL EMPLOYEES WOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO SEIZE IT, AND PROBABLY WAIVER OF VISA REQUIREMENT FOR SENATOR AND HIS IMMEDIATE ENTOURAGE. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT ANY CORRESPONDENTS (AT LEAST ANY KNOWN TO PGNU) WHOM SENATOR MIGHT INVITE TO ACCOMPANY HIM WOULD BE ADMITTED.

6. PLEASE ADVISE SENATOR'S DECISION SOONEST AND, IF HE NEVERTHELESS WISHES TO COME, REPEAT REFTEL, THIS TEL, AND ANY SUBSEQUENT TRAFFIC TO EMBASSY BANGKOK.
CHAPMAN UNQTE INGERSOLL

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